



EDITORIAL: Everyone wins in hotel venture

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It would be difficult to think of a better win-win-win.

Arc of Indiana's plan to open a training facility in a Muncie hotel in January that will prepare people with disabilities to work in the hospitality and food-service industries benefits everyone: the Hoosiers who will learn marketable skills, the hotel managers who will gain a valuable applicant pool, and the Muncie economic-development officials who will add a downtown hotel—connected to their convention center—to their eco-devo arsenal.

Players involved in this unique not-for-profit/for-profit venture that IBJ reporter Anthony Schoettle wrote about last week predict it will become a national model. We sure hope so.

What could benefit human-services agencies and their clients more than to bring those clients into the goods-and-services-producing, wage-paying work force? And what could benefit the economy better than to have as many people as possible participating in the full worker/consumer cycle, both earning and spending money?

Arc of Indiana deserves the credit for this brainchild. The Indianapolis-based organization serves people with mental or physical disabilities, and it has struggled for years to bring down the segment's high unemployment rate—now up to 82 percent. Executive Director Kim Dodson said the group thinks the new training facility—officially the Erskine Green Training Institute—will “move the needle.”

Indianapolis-based General Hotels Corp., which owns 11 Indiana hotels, is the for-profit half of the recipe. It will manage the Courtyard by Marriott in downtown Muncie that will house both the training institute and the 20 students at a time who will take nine- to 13-week classes there. About 20 percent of hotel staff will be Erskine Green graduates, certified by the Indiana Hospitality & Lodging Association for positions that include front-desk manager, sous chef and porter.

General Hotels CEO Jim Dora Jr. said he welcomes the Arc's intense training that many hotels are too time-crunched to invest in. He added that, for institute graduates who “live in cities where I have hotels, I'll be chasing them down to come work for me.”

Muncie, whose only downtown hotel closed almost 10 years ago, has already booked six conventions for next year in anticipation of the 150-room hotel set to open in December. An indoor walkway will connect the Horizon Convention Center to the hotel, which Convention Center President Joann McKinney called “a game changer” for Muncie. “This has just opened a tremendous amount of doors for us,” McKinney said.

We see every reason for the ingenuity of Hoosiers thinking outside the box to spread—changing the game for businesses and people with disabilities nationwide.